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# Woodrow Wilson: Examining the Scholarly Statesman Through a Rhetorical Lens

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**Woodrow Wilson:  
Examining the Scholarly Statesman  
through a Rhetorical Lens**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2012

Honors Capstone Project in Communication & Rhetorical Studies

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Date: 25 April 2012

## **Abstract**

My Capstone Project is a rhetorical and descriptive analysis of President Woodrow Wilson's most notable speeches from 1896 to 1917. As a scholar-president, I particularly focus on Wilson's ability to translate his personal scholarship into effective rhetoric at different points in his career. I provide the historical background and context necessary to understand the relevance and impact of the selected speeches. The six speeches that I analyze reflect his scholarship and rhetorical genius in the political arena, covering the three pivotal phases of his professional life: university scholar and president, governor, and President of the United States. I also consider how some less significant rhetorical pieces may have contributed to Wilson's leadership abilities and successes.

I begin my method of rhetorical analysis by classifying each speech according to Aristotle's three genres of rhetoric: epideictic, forensic, and deliberative. I then summarize the speech's content and principal objectives. My summaries include direct quotes from Wilson's speeches, my own interpretation of the quotes, and opinions from Wilsonian scholars and rhetorical experts. I further analyze each speech by using Kenneth Burke's dramatism paradigm, which includes defining the Agent, Act, Agency, Scene, and Purpose of the dramatistic pentad. After establishing these components, I assess the pentadic ratio of each speech. I also examine Wilson's consistency or differentiation with his choice of lexicon in each speech.

I found that the six occasions called for epideictic speeches, but were deliberative in content. In fact, Wilson progressively incorporated more policy into his speeches as his political career advanced. Wilson also was consistent with his scene-act ratio in all of the speeches, meaning that his speeches (the acts) depended on the setting (the scene) at the time of the speech. Although Wilson's vocabulary and rhetorical technique remained eloquent throughout his career, he employed different lexicon in each speech. Such lexicon included religious, academic, political, moral, and peace lexicons. These lexicons were the foundations of his speeches. Furthermore, Wilson's frequent discussion of "spirit" was related to each of these different lexicons.

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